

Fashion Blogs

Constructing an Identity through Body and Politics

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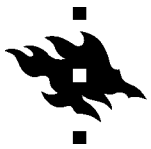
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<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract</p> <p>Fashion blogs are invention of the new millennia. Starting with something as simple as commenting on the outfit or a fashion event using this online medium, modern bloggers transformed it now into a successful business venture and a massive network for sharing ideas, tips and personal struggles with their followers. Thus, nowadays, a successful fashion blogger can be anything from a minor celebrity in the blogosphere, to a major international influencer in the fashion industry.</p> <p>Being personally fascinated by the way modern fashion bloggers run their blogs and manage to create a personal brand, I have decided to focus my research on creation of an online identity fashion bloggers go through whilst managing their personal blogs.</p> <p>Intentionally, or unintentionally personal fashion bloggers develop a certain type of writing and content creation that allows them to connect to many people. Fashion bloggers try to produce an idea that will guarantee them professional success. However, their personal background partially already set them up to be more connected to a certain group of people rather than the other.</p> <p>It is visible in their looks, ethnicity, lifestyle, personal interests and in opinions what type of people would be the majority of their followers. As a results, the network of followers that will be build by the blogger will determine what type of content she will be producing to attract even more readers.</p> <p>This is what will be discussed in this thesis: how fashion bloggers behave and what they primarily focus on in their blogs to keep up the online persona they are constructing.</p>			
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INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC, MAIN CONCEPT AND QUESTIONS

Clothes and fashion have been a part of our lives since the beginning of time. Fashion has also been important to me personally since childhood. Partly, because I was raised in the circle of women who take a great deal of pleasure in dressing nicely and ‘fashionable’, and partly because I have been fascinated by style and fashion industry as a child more than by anything else. Nevertheless, when I decided to write my thesis on the fashion topic it became clear that fashion world is still not being taken seriously, especially in the scientific community. This is what Jeffrey Bardzell and his colleagues have to say about it:

In research circles, fashion has mixed reputation. Alternately celebrated and reviled, it is often dismissed as superficial and unimportant. Yet, the role of fashion in the construction of modern identity, as well as its roles in the consumer culture and global commerce, has brought increased scholarly attention to fashion, especially within the field of cultural studies¹.

However, with the start of the new millennial and the Web 2.0 that brought us social media fashion became a new way to connect to people around the world on both personal and professional levels. In addition, people now are able to create a different identity for themselves² through it. Some lovers of fashion even managed to build a career as a result of running their own social media platforms, such as personal fashion blogs.

According to the Dictionary of Media and Communications blog is a:

Web site with a regularly updated list of commentary and links to information on the Internet. A blog often serves as a publicly accessible journal for an individual or community of individuals, and tends to reflect the distinct character and personality of the site’s users³.

¹ Bardzel et al. 2009, 1.

² Sedeke 2013, 1-2.

³ Danesi 2009, 44.

Fashion blogs, therefore, are a type of an online diary⁴ that is being shared with the like-minded followers, and includes opinions on latests fashion trends, events and other fashion-related subjects. However, during my research of fashion blogs it became clear that fashion is only one of a few major subjects in the content these bloggers produce. Fashion blogs essentially are another form of fashion journalism⁵, is it also a form of brand creation⁶. Bloggers create their own brand by publishing content that reflects their personality, but also enhances it in order to catch the attention of both, the fashion industry and real people. Therefore, to create a successful fashion blog these days one needs not only to post photos of clothes and discuss latest news in the fashion world, but also personally connect to the reader⁷⁸⁹ whether it is through dealing with the similar personal issues or by sharing the same views on the subjects outside fashion, such as politics and business.

By being a follower of several fashion blogs myself (in fact, some of them I am studying in this thesis), I became interested in the ways bloggers create their online persona. To get a better understanding of what fashion blogs are about and what it takes to become a successful fashion blogger (having a constant following and being able to make a living by writing for a blog) nowadays, I have decide to focus this research on several main categories that I have noticed are present in the blogging community. Therefore, I will be looking into the creation of blogger's identity in the social media presence.

From the beginning of my research it became obvious that fashion blogs are the whole universe of information on everything from tips on how to dress on a budget¹⁰ to lavish vacation spots¹¹, to essays about mental health and body issues¹². However, I have decided to

⁴ Rocamora 2011.

⁵ Sedeke 2013, 2.

⁶ Navarro et al. 2016, 90.

⁷ Rocamora 2011.

⁸ Titton 2015.

⁹ Fernandez et al. 2015.

¹⁰ Hannah Gale blog 31.03.2017.

¹¹ 5 Inch and Up 17.12.2017.

¹² hannahlouise 25.01.2016.

focus my research on the few leading topics mainly presented through the fashion and style sides of the blog. These topics, to my mind, describe the best how modern bloggers choose to create their fashionable persona¹³, and why these topics are crucial for bloggers to be able to build a strong following and, as a result, a successful business in the fashion blogging community.

To begin with, my research will be divided into two central themes: **Bodies** and **Politics**. First theme, **Bodies**, will focus on the significance of looks and the character bloggers present to their online audience. Through the blogs I chose to research for this thesis, I will try and find the connection between what bloggers share with their readers and the reasons why they do so. For instance, in the **Body Image and Bodiliness** we will focus on the physical aspects of being a blogger; how important is physical beauty for fashion bloggers.

On one hand, as we said already blogs are also a tool for either a creation of a new identity, or for an enhancement of an already existing one¹⁴. In such case, beauty must be also important for bloggers in order to reach the right audience. However, does it mean that bloggers looks have to fall into the same standards as those of professional models?

I will argue that physical beauty in the blogging community, even if a fashion one, has different meaning compared to the one we see in glossy magazines and in the advertisements for fashion brands¹⁵. The bloggers I am researching are women who decided to posts aspects of their lives online as a support system to their personal style, therefore they already promote a different body image to most other types of female models we see daily.

I will try and demonstrate how bloggers themselves view the infinite focus on female looks in fashion industry, but also how they present themselves as models in their own blogs. To achieve this, we will look into how different bloggers choose to appear in their blogs

¹³ Titton 2015.

¹⁴ Titton 2015, 209-210.

¹⁵ Prabu et al. 2002, 273.

compared to real life, or in other words how much thought they put into their looks to be more appealing to their readers.

On the other hand, bloggers need to connect to their followers in order to be relevant. People choose which blogs to read based on whether they can relate to the body image presented¹⁶. So, we will also look how some statements of bloggers regarding physical appearance affect their readers. And most importantly, is there an underlining reason why these female bloggers choose to post numerous photos of themselves on social media and talk about fashion and style.

To continue, we will look into how talking about one's personal life fit into being a fashion blogger. Fashion bloggers these days seem to make it their duty to get their followers as involved in their day-to-day lives as possible. Whether it is announcing a pregnancy or a marriage, letting a reader know about their 'real life' is something bloggers take seriously.

However, it does not apply to every fashion blogger. Based on my research, I divided fashion bloggers into two categories: those who are recognised by global fashion industry, and those who have a strong following but do not seem to be acknowledged by the same industry. This results in a rather different type of content bloggers produce.

As an addition to the female body representation in the fashion blogging community, we will take a look into what part ethnicity plays in the fashion content creation. Fashion industry slowly but steady becomes more diverse compared to only few years ago¹⁷. So, naturally when it comes to fashion blogging diversity plays a valuable role as well, mostly in the way bloggers choose to produce their content. For instance, what they write about, how they choose their new business ventures, how they explain their style, but also their ability to connect to people with the similar background.

¹⁶ Fernandez et al. 2015.

¹⁷ Suhrawardi, Forbes 23.05.2016.

The second theme for this thesis is **Politics**. Or to be more specific, political issues that are being discussed in the fashion blogosphere and the politics of consumerism on both parts: the bloggers‘ and the readers‘.

It might be rather surprising to hear that fashion bloggers discuss current political issues along all things fashion and style. However, we will examine why it is important that they do so, and also what value writing about politics brings to the fashion blog.

As for consumerism, as we said before, fashion blogging can become a successful business. So we will examine how writing about clothes impacts bloggers financially, and also what it means for the fashion market.

As a conclusion, the questions I would like to raise and answer in this thesis are:

1. How fashion bloggers choose to create their identity through the medium of fashion blogs?
2. Is there a formula to becoming a successful fashion blogger?
3. How does the content of fashion blogs impact its followers?

1.2. METHODS, SOURCE MATERIAL AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

British style is known for being the most creative and inspiring; and London Fashion Week to be one of the biggest fashion and cultural events in Europe, not to mention Britain itself¹⁸. Furthermore, London has always been considered more eclectic in its fashion and more welcoming to designers from around the world than, say, Italian fashion industry, or French¹⁹. Therefore, giving the opportunity to young fashionistas to experiment in their personal style and opening them to the fashion of other cultures making London even more eclectic.

¹⁸ O‘Byrne 2009, 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 232-233.

As of 2008 British fashion industry was worth £40 billion²⁰. So I could only assume that it grew even more since then, and with the industry so did the opportunities for young fashion enthusiasts. Hence, I have decided to focus my research of fashion blogs in the capital of European fashion, London²¹.

It appears to me that such diverse city must attract not only fashion designers, editors or journalists, but also ordinary women from around the world, and some of these women will happen to try and become acclaimed fashion bloggers. I was not wrong. There are plenty keen fashion addicts online who try to break into fashion industry by starting their own fashion blog, hoping that it will attract thousands of followers and they will become the next Chiara Ferragni (see: *The Blond Salad*) or Leandra Medine (see: *Man Repeller*), or Camille Charrière (*Camille Over the Rainbow*).

Due to such wide variety of options, that sadly do not produce rich enough content in order to contribute to my research, I have decided to focus my attention only on nine bloggers. These bloggers seem to have the biggest following on social media, and obviously are located in the London fashion capital rather than elsewhere in Britain.

I also elected nine bloggers believing that it will provide me with enough diversity in looks and content to conduct a high quality research. Indeed, these nine fashion bloggers are of different nationalities, such as French, Finnish, British, Cameroonian and Japanese, different body types, lifestyles, and even different approach to running a blog.

I should also probably clarify that the fashion bloggers I am looking into in this research are female fashion bloggers in their twenties and early thirties. Research shows that readers of fashion blogs are mostly women under 35 years old²². Thus, I assumed that it would be most logical to research peers of these readers: female fashion bloggers ages from 22 to 33 years

²⁰ Ibid., 7.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Navarro et al. 2016, 88.

old located in London. Naturally, the fashion blogs of these women would be my primary source of material for this research. These are the blogs:

1. *Style Bubble* by Susie Lau, 33 years old;
2. *Wish Wish Wish* by Carrie Santana de Silva, 25;
3. *5 Inch and Up* by Sandra Hagelstam, 28;
4. *That Pommie Girl* by Sarah Ashcroft, 22;
5. *Camille Over the Rainbow* by Camille Charrière, 28;
6. *hannahlouise* by Hannah Farrington, 23;
7. *Freddie Harrel* by Freddie Harrel, 28;
8. *Hannha Gale* by Hannah Gale, 27;
9. *La Petite Anglaise* by Ella Catliff, 25.

In order to be able to cultivate much quality content for my thesis, I was also studying these blogs alone for a little over a year, since the 1st of June 2016 until 1st of December 2017.

Above all, my research is a qualitative and descriptive study. Meaning the research '*is based on words, feelings, emotions, sounds and other non-numerical and unquantifiable elements*'²³, and is '*a statement of affairs as they are at present with the researcher having no control over variable*'²⁴. In addition, this study is also ethnographic. Meaning, that I as a researcher, immerse into the culture of my study and observe how it progresses²⁵.

In addition, I was hugely inspired by the works of Agnès Rocamora²⁶²⁷, Gemma Martínez Navarro²⁸ and Monica Tilton²⁹ among many others. Tilton and Rocamora both conducted several studies on fashion blogs and how they build identity of the blogger, in the means of

²³Research Methodology 2019.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rocamora 2011.

²⁷ Rocamora, Mora 2015.

²⁸ Navarro et al. 2016.

²⁹ Tilton 2015.

cultural studies. As my research is in the field of Area and Cultural Studies, too, I was able to adopt as much findings from their work as I needed. Since Area and Cultural Studies is also an interdisciplinary field, I was also able to apply Tilton and Rocamora's work to different themes in this thesis from **Body Image** to **Personal Lives**, to the issues of **Nationalism, Xenophonia and Racism**.

2. BLOGS AND BODIES

2.1. BODY IMAGE AND BODILINESS

Whether swiping through glossy fashion magazines, passing by advertisements in a shop window or watching television commercials as well as fashion shows, the first thing one always notices is the look of the models. Female models in particular. They are lean and fit, or worse: thin and anorexic; have thick, full glossy hair which would be hard to achieve for others without professional help; their skin is smooth and perfect without a trace of a wrinkle, spot, or a pore even when they claim to be makeup free. These characteristics, which intentionally or unintentionally are being promoted as easy to achieve unfortunately are often false and unrealistic, and therefore promote unhealthy body image³⁰. Furthermore, the very same media then claim that *true beauty* is found within³¹. This conclusively leads us to women even outside the magazines and modelling industry who try and sell clothes, makeup and other ‘beauty’ enhancing products to women outside the industry, also known as personal fashion bloggers³².

Brian Moeran claims that beauty and looks are inseparable from fashion. This is a reason to why even fashion magazines feature trending looks from runway shows twice a year before or after Fashion Weeks³³. This raises a question, are fashion blogs any different in their nature of offering advice on looks and beauty from other media platforms, or are they really just an additional source of improbable information for females across the globe? If so, one might argue that young female fashion bloggers pursue only further the media image of what beauty is supposed to look like, and hence what value are they bringing?

³⁰ Prabu et al. 2002, 273.

³¹ Moeran 2010, 493.

³² Navarro et al. 2016.

³³ Ibid., 492.

Fundamentally, this thesis focuses on ten women in their twenties who write about what is in trend in fashion and how one is supposed to wear a particular piece of clothing from either high-street clothing brands or designer ones just like magazines do. However, it is obvious from the beginning of my research that these women look nothing like professional fashion models. I am not implying that they are less beautiful or not skinny enough, but it is more about the way they present themselves and their style in their respective blogs³⁴. It is very clear all these bloggers' bodies are of different shapes, they have different heights³⁵, do not have flawless doll-like skin³⁶, and they are open about it. It is not to say that some of the content is not retouched or they have no professional help setting up photoshoots but rather that they are more candid in the subject of female beauty on social media and how it affects people's everyday life.

For instance, Hanna Gale of *Hannah Gale* fashion blog has posted several articles on body-shaming and skin problems she has been facing in as little as five months I have been following her work. Gale not only writes about the way her self confidence was affected through the media, but also confesses that it made her judge other women's appearance, as well³⁷³⁸³⁹. Other bloggers such as Camille Charrière (*Camille Over the Rainbow*), Freddie Harrel (*Freddie Harrel*) and Susie Lau (*Style Bubble*) all took a part in Say Something Nice campaign created by Amazon Fashion in the summer 2016. The campaign consisted of series of self-directed professional videos where bloggers and other fashionistas spoke about being bullied and judged on the social media for the way they look and dress. The topics focused also on how to be comfortable in one's skin referring to both personal style and body image. As a consequence, response from their readers to this campaign was immediate⁴⁰. All three posts on each fashion blog listed above were supported by long, opinionated commentaries such as:

³⁴ Freddie Harrel blog 01.11.2016.

³⁵ hannahlouise blog 25.01.2016.

³⁶ Hannah Gale Vlog 15.11.2016.

³⁷ Hannah Gale blog 29.09.2016.

³⁸ Ibid. 13.12.2016.

³⁹ Ibid. 08.11.2016.

⁴⁰ Say Something Nice | Amazon Fashion 23.06.2016.

It's quite hard for me to understand why someone would tell something mean to someone else about their appearance in the first place. Sure, I've thought critically of the way someone dresses before multiple times, perhaps made fun of it in my head. But there is a huge difference between that and between being actively consciously and deliberately coming up to someone or their picture on social media to tell them something mean and horrible about their appearance. Before you start typing those nasty words, the first thing that must come up to your head if you do have a normal intelligence is, 'how is this person going to feel if I tell them that? Surely bad, so better not'. Therefore, I think there must be something really wrong with someone who is deliberately mean to someone else and perhaps they have psychological issues which cannot be changed by telling them not to be mean. However, I think that a comping like this will expose them and make them think twice in saying something mean to someone else, because they will just be embarrassing themselves. I admire your courage in taking a step against it with this campaign. I wished there were more bloggers like you in this regard. X.⁴¹

Based on this commentary from a reader of *Camille Over the Rainbow*, it seems that people enjoy being able to relate to the fashion blogger on a more personal level. In fact, they seem to encourage bloggers to be more outspoken about personal struggles. Here is another commentary from a reader of *Style Bubble* on the matter:

I am sure we can all agree that the internet is festering with negative — and downright mean comments passed on those who dare (or who manage) to get in the spotlight; I also think however we need to beware of just throwing flowers at each other: is there to be a conversation between the blogger and her audience, rather than a monologue, there must be room for constructive criticism. Otherwise the blogtopia will end up as little more than collaborative marketing! [...] I totally agree however we need to place the stress on “constructive” rather than on criticism, and I am sure that to just “say something nice!” (or to hear it said to you!) might bring this to youngsters' attention!⁴²

The second commentary's writer, on the other hand, talks more about how there should be a room for conversation and criticism between bloggers and their readers. Otherwise, blogging will be yet another more improved version of advertisement. However the criticism has to be objective rather than hurtful.

⁴¹ Camille Over the Rainbow 24.06.2016, commentary from a user.

⁴² Style Bubble 24.06.2016, commentary from a user.

In addition, in the promotional video for Say Something Nice the bloggers were asked if they themselves ever judged other women. The answers to questions such as “Have you ever been judged for the way you dress?” and ‘Have you ever judged someone else based on their style?’ were usually very similar: ‘Oh my God, I’ve definitely been judged!’ said Freddie Harrel, or ‘I get judged all the time!’ said Gala Gonzalez, another fashion blogger. Yet, the answers also featured some thought-provoking quotes such as: ‘I should be ashamed to be on TV. I should be ashamed to wear underwear at my size’, recalls plus size model Clementine Desseaux on hurtful commentary on social media; Camille Charrière adds: ‘The reason I left France (I’m French) is because I did not like French mentality, French attitude regarding style’⁴³.

When speaking of ‘thought-provoking’, I mean quotations of commentaries that likely shed a light on how much easier it is to criticise appearance of others thanks to a rather contradictory environment of World Wide Web. On one hand, a blogger, in our case, is constructing a persona, or an online identity for the self-presentation and validation from a targeted group of peers. This persona is partially based on the the real self, however is considerably shaped to please and validate oneself in the eyes of a particular community. Because of the inability to communicate with a targeted group outside the Internet, though, the feedback has a completely opposite effect, and the characteristics that were created to allure are now an object of criticism⁴⁴.

The list of harmful commentaries continues in the campaign video for Say Something Nice where Charrière explains that there are certain boundaries when it comes to dressing up in France, and if one does not fit in, a woman, in this case will be judged. The blogger carries on saying that she would be told by both men and women alike even on the street ‘That’s too short’, ‘That’s too this, that’s too that’⁴⁵. Susie Lau mentions she has been called ‘Clown, clown, clown, ugly, fat’⁴⁶. In addition, Hannah Farrington of *hannahlouisef* wrote a post in

⁴³ Say Something Nice | Amazon Fashion 23.06.2016.

⁴⁴ Keipi et al. 2016, 18-19.

⁴⁵ Say Something Nice | Amazon Fashion 23.06.2016.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

July 2016 about how important it is for women to support each other rather than criticise based on looks⁴⁷. Interestingly though is the way she leaped soon after straight into linking the message to her outfit (and describing it) where the T-shirt said *Girls Girls Girls* you can see in **Figure 1**.



Figure 1. Hannah Farrington wearing a T-shirt with words *Girls Girls Girls* on it. *hannahlouise* blog.

Thus, contrary to other bloggers I have been researching for this discourse (e.g. Hannah Gale, Susie Lau, Carrie Santana de Silva of *Wish Wish Wish*) Hannah Farrington does not dwell on rather global subjects (feminism and Girl Power), for the lack of a better word, even though she refers to those from time to time in her posts. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know why without asking the blogger herself, but I definitely have noticed this diversion in her ‘blogging technique’ compared to some other fashion bloggers I have referred to above.

Dr. Amyris Fernandez along with the team did a study on Brazilian fashion blogs to find out how often those are used for personal reasons (e.g. advice, inspiration and so on), and how much they actually affect readers’ fashion choices. The results proved that fundamental criteria for choosing which fashion blog to read depends on blogger’s body type. Apparently,

⁴⁷ hannahlouise blog 17.07.2016.

the reader would prefer to be able to identify their body type with the blogger's⁴⁸. Although, the research showed the results of the importance of body image in fashion blogs, I assume that these findings could also be transferred towards the nationality and other matters that connect certain fashion bloggers to everyday women. These other matters I will discuss further in the thesis, though.

Personal connection can in fact benefit both sides argues Monica Titton. She addresses the issue of blogs and their influence over personal identity and self-esteem, and states that indeed young women tend to increase their self-worth by managing their own fashion blogs as well as reading the ones they can personally connect to in any way⁴⁹. To add more, Agn s Rocamora claims that blogs can be viewed as a key to empowerment and boldness⁵⁰, even if bloggers' self-portraits online seem to work in favour of assertion of traditional stereotypes of female beauty.

Developing the idea of growth of self-worth and self-esteem, I would like to call attention to the fact that all fashion blogs I have been researching had bloggers themselves as main models. If there was a dress or a pair of shoes, or a hat to show off, there usually would be at least five photos of the blogger wearing that same dress or a pair of shoes, or a hat. Different poses, different close-ups, full-body portraits or hidden face in the pictures are featured in every single photoshoots which consists of a single outfit, though. However, only once I came across any type of a commentary on this rather interesting part of blogging. Carrie Santana de Silva, blogger of *Wish Wish Wish* wrote an apology of-a-sort to her readers for posting twenty eight pictures of herself in a blue dress explaining this as: 'I was never an aspiring model, but loved the process of taking pictures, snapping hundreds of frames and hurrying home to see how I could edit them [...] I didn't wake up at 5am for nothing'⁵¹.

⁴⁸ Fernandez et al. 2015, 4.

⁴⁹ Titton 2015, 203.

⁵⁰ Rocamora 2011, 421-422.

⁵¹ Wish Wish Wish 08.09.2016.

Moreover, the way photoshoots are staged also has an impact on how the blogger's body is presented. The more professional the photoshoot, the more chances it has been retouched. All ten bloggers I have been researching vary in how popular they are. The most popular (judging from the campaigns they take part in, collaborations and events they attend) have the most professional photoshoots, at least when they shoot for those collaborations and campaigns⁵²⁵³. Based on this, I think it is fair to assume that during those photoshoots the blogger's body and skin will be 'improved' to fit more into the social accepted standards of beauty and fashion industry⁵⁴. Therefore, unless these women themselves choose to share their 'real' face to people in their blogs, one might never find out how true they are in their blogs⁵⁵.

For instance, Sandra Hagelstam of *5 Inch and Up* was on the cover of Finnish ELLE magazine in October 2016 which inevitably will be modified to fit industry's standards, her photoshoots for her fashion blog are also highly staged, and she is never too personal in her writing⁵⁶. Thus, any of her messages on body-positivity would be very doubtful. Same can be also said about Camille Charrière and her approach to writing posts in her blog⁵⁷.

Another blogger, Sarah Ashcroft of *That Pommie Girl* also contributes to that modern socially accepted idea of beauty, to my mind. At least, the photos of her suggest that. Long blond (dyed) hair, thick layer of makeup, full lips, mini skirts or shorts that often show lots of legs, very tight revealing tops that show cleavage, and high heels are all attributes of an average female blogger based purely on my findings during this research. I personally have not found her writing about personal life nor giving any sort of opinion on anything but clothes, constructing herself an identity that might, or might not be the same in real life⁵⁸.

⁵² *5 Inch and Up* 22.08.2017.

⁵³ *Camille Over the Rainbow* 26.08.2016.

⁵⁴ *Hannah Gale* blog 12.07.2017.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 08.02.2017

⁵⁶ *5 Inch and Up* 25.09.2016.

⁵⁷ *Camille Over the Rainbow* 2016-2017.

⁵⁸ *That Pommie Girl* 2017.

In the essence of blogging lies the construction of identity⁵⁹. Therefore, it is understandable why we see such a mixture of personal statements, more of which I will cover later in this thesis, and an attempt to fit into the already established beauty industry to develop blogging business. Hence, it appears that the fashion blogging is rather an ambivalent platform, agree Mora and Rocamora. On one hand, it is a starting line for empowerment and self-representation that might not be accepted easily in the real world, as well as an additional route towards the increase of consumerism. On the other, the combination of fashion and social interaction for exchanging everyday life experience is making both fashion and blogging significant tools for manufacturers and users⁶⁰.

Compared to Hagelstam, Ashcroft and Charrière, Hannah Gale (*Hannah Gale*), Carrie Santana de Silva (*Wish Wish Wish*) and even Susi Lau (*Style Bubble*) might be more relatable for a larger audience of young women because most of their portraits are from daily life and vacations. Gale also supports her statements on body matters with video blogs, or *vlogs* as they are called, where she often appears makeup-free, in pyjamas and even with dirty hair⁶¹.

In addition, Freddie Harrel wears her hair in a big puffy Afro through which, on one hand she expresses her individuality, saying that it has been only five years she has been wearing it like that. She never even thought that as a black woman she should not relax her hair; from a young age it was simply a routine, but now the blogger started wearing her hair like that because at last she is comfortable in her own skin⁶². However, it can also be that she intentionally or unintentionally protests what one might call a European idea of real beauty that does not fit all women across the world⁶³.

2.2. PERSONAL LIVES

⁵⁹ Rocamora 2011, 410.

⁶⁰ Rocamora, Mora 2015, 151-152.

⁶¹ Hannah Gale vlog 15.11.2016.

⁶² Freddie Harrel blog 26.03.2016.

⁶³ Thompson 2009, 832.

Another interesting element of fashion blog writing I have found is the amount of personal information that is being shared. I have mentioned some points of it in the previous subchapter, such as discussing being bullied because of how one dresses and looks as well as struggles with hair, skin and body issues. Still, besides these issues it seems perfectly natural for fashion bloggers to discuss other aspects of their lives, for instance how a woman goes through the day, her dating life or when, how and to whom she gets married, becomes pregnant and so on.

One might wonder what does it have to do with fashion, but building on research Fernandez conducted regarding the impact of personal reliability to particular fashion bloggers, we can assume that sharing personal information is essential for bloggers in order to increase the number of followers⁶⁴. Although Fernandez was focused on body image in particular, we might consider the possibility of transferring the findings to the personal life image, too.

In August 2016 Susi Lau and Freddie Harrel announced their pregnancies, a year later Hannah Gale announced she and her partner are expecting, as well⁶⁵. The announcements were not ‘official’ in a way, but rather as a part of yet another post on fashion and style along with the photos of an outfit. The photos showed already visible baby bumps styled in a fun bright top and a dress for Lau (slightly covering the bump with a jumper tightened over it)⁶⁶, and in a long flowery dress for Harrel⁶⁷. Interestingly, the latter one said nothing about her outfit in her post but kept sharing information on how pregnancy is treating her, unlike Lau who quickly moved on from the announcement to the fashion show she attended and took a part in a few days prior.

In later posts during following months Harrel has not written anything about the pregnancy, though. The reader could more or less follow what is going on only through pictures she was

⁶⁴ Fernandez 2015, 4.

⁶⁵ Hannah Gale blog 07.07.2017.

⁶⁶ Style Bubble 03.08.2016.

⁶⁷ Freddie Harrel blog 25.08.2016.

posting in new outfits⁶⁸. However, Lau would mention the progress of her pregnancy now and then in the following months in her posts, but refrained from taking too many pictures of herself, and even when she did, she would hide the belly as much as possible⁶⁹. I cannot explain the difference in sharing personal information between fashion bloggers who seem to be building their careers on sharing information and opinions. Although, I must add that when it comes to giving an opinion on a different subject such as politics, which I will cover later in my research, *Style Bubble* (also known as Susi Lau) blog is more vocal than *Freddie Harrel*.

Monica Tilton came up with a label *fashionable persona* to explain the need of fashion bloggers

to share their personal lives through social media. It is the narration of self that constructs the identity of a fashion blogger through her blog. *Fashionable persona* is a mixture of biographical information on personality and subjectivity of a fashion world. It is a character based on blogger's real-self. Thus, for a female blogger it is somewhat essential to cover various aspects of her everyday life and experience to design an improved, for the lack of a better word, version of herself⁷⁰.

It is also fascinating how each of the bloggers I have been researching has different limits on how personal she is in her blog. Hannah Gale, for instance, besides body issues is very open discussing such topics as mental health and contraceptive issues⁷¹. Her boyfriend features in numerous posts when on vacation, or how they met, or what are their plans for the next weekend⁷². She can describe her day from the moment she woke up until she went to bed, what problems occurred during the day, if any, about her friends and business ventures⁷³.

Camille Charrière, on the other hand, never reveals anything about her private life unless it has something to do with fashion or business. In fact, her posts usually consist of little text,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2016.

⁶⁹ Style Bubble 09.10.2016.

⁷⁰ Tilton 2015, 210.

⁷¹ Hannah Gale blog 07.08.2017.

⁷² Ibid. 23.03.2017.

⁷³ Ibid. 28.03.2017.

and the main focus lies on the outfits she is wearing or the fashion event she has been involved in⁷⁴. Same can be said about Ella Catliff of *La Petite Anglaise*. Catliff even posts only as often as three times a month, at best. Her posts consist of strictly collaborations she is involved in or future big projects. Based on those collaborations (i.e. Ascot & Longines, Disney x Coach, Lacoste⁷⁵⁷⁶⁷⁷) and projects it is fair to say that she is one of the most influential English bloggers, but based on how little readers comment on her posts⁷⁸ she is not as popular among people as her other colleagues I researched for this thesis. Meaning, it is probably very hard for most young women to relate to her English aristocrat lifestyle.

Wish Wish Wish blog's Carrie Santana de Silva is also fairly open about her personal life. She made an announcement of her marriage to her boyfriend of ten years in the summer 2015⁷⁹. The announcement was followed by a report on the wedding ceremony. Afterwards, there were numerous posts on the vacations she and her husband have been taking including a mini honeymoon⁸⁰. Usually, de Silva does not open up further, except maybe how she went through her day.

Although the blogger's husband is usually just being mentioned by Carrie in her posts, he also plays an important role in constructing what we have called *the fashionable persona* of his wife. The husband usually acts as a photographer during vacations or the couple's outings. He is the one who takes tens of photos from different angles at the same time acting as a person from outside who had a different opinion in which position is more flattering, and will bring more attention to the outfit and the blogger herself. The results of this can be read in many positive commentaries from the readers: "These photos are so beautiful! I love your outfit, its so pretty and summery (it's making me long for winter to be over here in Australia!)"⁸¹, and

⁷⁴ Camille Over the Rainbow 2016-2017.

⁷⁵ La Petite Anglaise 12.06.2017.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 7.06.2017.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 02.08.2017.

⁷⁸ La Petite Anglaise 2016.

⁷⁹ Wish Wish Wish 23.06.2015.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 15.06.2016.

⁸¹ Ibid. 11.08.2016, commentary from a user.

“Wow Carrie, these photos are a little slice of heaven, and The little Snippets of Reem’s wedding look so stunning! Also, that last photo made me quite speechless! It’s absolutely beautiful X”⁸².

Then again, it looks as mostly those are less *acclaimed* bloggers in the fashion industry who share nearly every aspect of their private loves. It is hard for me to define who *an acclaimed blogger* is, but based on the content of all ten bloggers I have been researching I would refer this term to those bloggers who take part in collaborations with famous luxury brands, wear mostly luxury brands, are on covers of magazines, attend exclusive fashion shows and have access to behind the scenes of major fashion projects. Therefore, because these bloggers have an established position in fashion industry, and are recognised by it on an international level, even if only within Europe, they do not need to promote their personal lives in order to gain more followers. For instance, Camille Charrière is recognised by *Business of Fashion 500* as one of the fashion industry’s leading influencers who help to shape \$2.4 trillion fashion industry⁸³. However, Hannah Gale is not mentioned in any major fashion business outlets, nor is being recognised internationally as a fashion industry’s insider.

So, acclaimed bloggers in this thesis would be Camille Charrière (*Camille Over the Rainbow*), Sandra Hagelstam (*5 Inch and Up*), Ella Catliff (*La Petite Anglaise*), Freddie Harrel (*Freddie Harrel*) and Susi Lau (*Style Bubble*). The *less acclaimed* in this sense would be Carrie Santana de Silva (*Wish Wish Wish*), Hannah Gale (*Hannah Gale*) and Hannah Louise Farrington (*hannahlouise*) and Srah Ashcroft (*That Pommie Girl*).

However, it does not have to be necessarily true. Rocamora makes a point that the narration of personal stories does not deprive attention from the style or the blogger⁸⁴. In fact, it supports the business of fashion in the art of self-creation. As a result, it becomes more logical to write posts that include not only pictures of outfits and a short description, but also some additional personal information in order to attract the attention of a right audience.

⁸² Ibid. 10.10.2016, commentary from a user.

⁸³ Business of Fashion 19.04.2019.

⁸⁴ Rocamora 2011, 412.

2.3. ETHNICITY

As I have mentioned in the introduction part, I have tried to find young female fashion bloggers all based in London, but also for them to be relatively diverse in looks, nationalities, style and ethnicity, so that my research would be diverse enough. Modern fashion industry is being criticised for lack of diversity as never before⁸⁵⁸⁶. And although it seemed to change in the past few years or so, there is still a lot to be working on. The diversity does not concern only body image or gender matter, or ethnicity. All these components matter equally. However, at the moment I would like to focus this part of my research on ethnicity.

Research shows that during Fashion Weeks for Autumn/Winter 2015 in four major fashion capitals London, Paris, New York and Milan, 80% of models were white. Apparently, this was an improvement from Spring/Summer 2015 fashion shows. A year before 90% of models who appeared in fashion magazines were white⁸⁷. By finding fashion bloggers of different ethnicities I wanted to find out what are their thoughts on the issue of diversity, and examine if the content of their blogs is any different compared to others bloggers because of that; also does it somehow impact how the readers react to these bloggers.

To begin with, all the bloggers are located in London, but that doesn't mean they all are British. Susi Lau is of Japanese descent, Sandra Hagelstam is Finnish, Camille Charrière is French, Freddie Harrel refers to herself as both French and Cameroonian (her mother is from Cameroon, although it is unknown where her father is from⁸⁸). Moreover, they all seem to be proud of their ancestry.

For instance, Charrière always points out that she is French, usually to support her opinions. In *Body and Bodiliness* I have referred to her quote “The reason I left France (I’m French) is because i did not like french mentality, french attitude regarding style”. It was her talking

⁸⁵ Business of Fashion 11.10.2015.

⁸⁶ Suhrawardi, Forbes 23.05.2016.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Freddie Harrel blog 01.09.2016.

about being judged by others. Later she adds that she is rather judgmental herself of other's style though, and connects it to being French herself⁸⁹. It is hard to say whether Charrière is right about it or not, but the number of times she explains herself by reminding the readers of her blog of her nationality clearly suggests that her background has shaped her sense of style as well as a way of thinking. To support this, here is another quote taken from her blog *Camille Over the Rainbow*: "Good luck getting me in red, yellow or green", referring to French style's preference over the monotone, calm, earthy colours⁹⁰. To add more, although Camille seems to refer a lot to her 'Frenchness', she never actually brings up her life in France or Paris. In fact, a lot of her posts pay tribute to London instead with the help of photoshoot locations (London background portrays Notting Hill, her neighbourhood), or she writes about her love for the city of London⁹¹.

Sandra Hagelstam, though, mentions her hometown Helsinki relatively often in her blog *5 Inch and Up*. She does admire and love London very much just like all of these bloggers, but also always makes sure to remind the reader that she is Finnish⁹². Even the photographers she works with are Finnish⁹³. Hagelstam attends the biggest events in Helsinki such as Flow Festival⁹⁴ and ELLE Style Awards in Finland⁹⁵, works as digital ambassador for the cosmetics company Lumene⁹⁶, promotes Finnish brands and designers (wears Marimekko clothes)⁹⁷ and takes pictures for her blog on the stairs of the cathedral on Senate square in Helsinki⁹⁸. It is obvious that Hagelstam cherishes her background regardless of where she lives now (note: few month ago Hagelstam bought an apartment in Helsinki which she now also refers to as her home. It seems, though, the post since had been deleted.). However, unlike Charrière I

⁸⁹ Say Something Nice | Amazon Fashion 23.06.2016.

⁹⁰ Camille Over the Rainbow 08.06.2016.

⁹¹ Ibid. 10.08.2016.

⁹² 5 Inch and Up 12.08.2017.

⁹³ Ibid. 19.04.2017.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 13.08.2017.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 26.10.2016.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 23.11.2016.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 19.04.2017.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 05.08.2017.

have not noticed that she would try and explain her opinions using the ‘culture’ she grew up in.

Following is Freddie Harrel. She is the only black fashion blogger on my list which takes us back to the issue of diversity in fashion industry. I must add that the reason she is featured in my research as the only person of colour is not due to my personal preferences, but rather that she is the only one I could find who had relatively same prominence in this online business as her white colleagues. Therefore, she was one of the first names to stand out when I was searching for the bloggers in London, and would fit my criteria. Even Harrel herself brings up struggles she has had to face because of her skin colour. The blogger took a part in Style Like U project on YouTube to speak about the relation between her style and individuality⁹⁹. The project was created by two women, a mother and a daughter where they invite women of different professions to ask them personal questions, and with each answer the interviewees would take off a layer of clothing revealing ‘what’s underneath’¹⁰⁰.

During her interview, Harrel discussed her life in Paris as a child of a different race saying that the older she was getting the more challenges she was facing because of it. These struggles, therefore, had an impact on the way she would dress, wear her hair and act around people. She would borrow clothes from her wealthy friend to fit in with the rich white people environment of the private school she was attending. In fact, she would dress not as different from other people as she does now, so that she would not draw additional attention towards herself. Furthermore, the blogger has talked about how she used to straighten her curly hair in order to look more like her white friends. Nowadays, though, she decided to embrace its natural look and wears only Afro hairstyle (photo below), implementing that she felt white society she was growing up in has pressured her into feeling lesser because of her obvious different looks¹⁰¹.

⁹⁹ Freddie Harrel blog 26.03.2016.

¹⁰⁰ Style Like U 2019.

¹⁰¹ Freddie Harrel blog 26.03.2016.



Figure 2. Freddie Harrel proudly showing off her Afro.
Freddie Harrel blog.

Speaking of *natural* Afro and how black women felt that they should straighten their hair to fit in the predominantly white society (based on other interviews of Style Like U)¹⁰²¹⁰³¹⁰⁴. It is actually rather an interesting conclusion that the reason for women (and men for that matter) of black culture to change their hairstyles is to become more accepted. In her book *Ain't I A Beauty Queen?* Maxine Craig argues that actually in the 1970s in the mid of *black is beautiful* movement during which African Americans were adamant to show of their pride of black culture and distance themselves from what would be considered 'white', it was an Afro hairstyle for women that was considered beautiful by black people. In the chapter *Yvonne's Wig* Graig actually discusses how her friend Yvonne had to wear an Afro wig to be accepted by her own people because her natural hair was short and tightly curled¹⁰⁵. This made me wonder about what Freddie Harrel said regarding feeling pressured into straightening her hair

¹⁰² Style Like U 11.02.2015.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 07.09.2018.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 13.02.2017.

¹⁰⁵ Craig 2002, 109.

to fit in with her white friends¹⁰⁶. Based on what Graig wrote about her friend Yvonne, it seems that Afro or any hairstyle for that matter that isn't effortless to the person should be hardly considered *natural*. It just depends which part of society a person tries to fit into, and since the fashion changes constantly and so does what is considered 'beautiful', it can be hard to pin-point who is to blame¹⁰⁷.

Nevertheless, the story of Yvonne was set in the 1970s America, and the views on Afro hairstyles

have probably changed a lot since in both black and white communities, and their politics, not to mention in Europe and the USA. This means that the explanation given by Craig does not necessarily has to apply to the current reasons black people choose to wear Afro hairstyles of any type. Still, unfortunately, I cannot give a better explanation for why Afro hairstyle Harrel chooses to wear is her way of protesting against white supremacy she faced as a child¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁶ Freddie Harrel blog 26.03.2016.

¹⁰⁷ Craig 2002, 109.

¹⁰⁸ Freddie Harrel blog 23.06.2016.

3. BLOG POLITICS

3.1. NATIONALISM, XENOPHOBIA AND RACISM

Social Media became one of the new modern digital platforms that offered us to stay connected to each other and the public also via mobile Internet. We are able to stay updated on the current news around the world constantly which became a huge advantage to the political communities or an individual as they are able to provide us with the information concerning their activities, share their information on the current topics and report new arising issues.¹⁰⁹ As Andrea Calderaro claims: ‘The Internet has evolved since its beginnings and its influence on politics has changed due to the rise of the many new digital platforms’¹¹⁰. It looks as blogging became one of these *new digital platforms* where even regular people can share their views on current political situation regardless if their blog is meant for it or not.

Even fashion bloggers do not write only about fashion-related topics. During my research, it became clear that a fashion blog is the whole universe filled with tips and opinions on traveling, beauty, business, and last but not least: politics. Especially in the past few years there have been several topics in the world of politics that fashion bloggers felt the need to address. I find it also very important to note that based on my study of blogs presented in this research not all political matters are present in the fashion blogging community, but rather only those that the blogger can personally relate to, or those that are somehow related to feminism. To my mind, the strong presence of feminism makes sense as I have been analysing modern *female* fashion bloggers. Because these women are also rather diverse in their ancestry, their opinions on xenophobia and racism are the most present ones, as well¹¹¹¹¹²¹¹³.

¹⁰⁹ Calderaro 2018, 781.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 782.

¹¹¹ Style Bubble 28.08.2016.

¹¹² Refinery29 24.10.2018.

¹¹³ Wish Wish Wish 29.06.2016.

As I have said in the beginning of this thesis, I tried to find fashion bloggers who are located in London but are as diverse in their looks as they are in their heritage. This approach helps me narrow the research and make it more relevant. Therefore, I managed to find a rather wide amount of content on various topics I present in this thesis. Eventually, I noticed that when something prominent happens in the world of politics quite a few bloggers make it their duty to share their personal experience and/or opinion on the matter. Although, I must add that out of all the fashion bloggers I have been researching for this thesis only very few actually give their opinions on the political issues online. Most others tend to speak up on the subjects concerning only fashion, for instance *La Petite Anglaise*, *That Pommie Girl*, *India Rose*, *5 Inch and Up*, *Camille Over the Rainbow*. I have found no other explanation for this rather than it is simply a personal choice.

Beginning with the Syrian refugees trying and finding shelter in Europe, and its impact on the border issue a couple of bloggers decided to share their experience with being either from another country instead of the UK¹¹⁴, or someone from their family moving over there due to personal reasons¹¹⁵. This would also include Brexit referendum and eventual exit of Britain from the European Union¹¹⁶. So, it also looks as the political topics that the bloggers in this thesis decide to reflect on usually concern the UK, although not necessarily.

For instance, a burqa or a burkini incident in Nice, France in August 2016, when French policemen forced a woman to take off her long-sleeved tunic in which she was resting on the beach was another political subject brought up in this fashion community. A week before the incident, Nice became one of the latest French regions to ban burkini ‘citing public concern following recent terrorist attacks in the country’¹¹⁷. These events caused lots of outrage not only in the more traditional media outlets, but in the fashion blogs as well. Even though, the

¹¹⁴ Freddie Harrel blog 26.03.2016.

¹¹⁵ Hannah Gale blog 29.06.2016.

¹¹⁶ Wish Wish Wish 29.06.2016.

¹¹⁷ Quinn, The Guardian 24.08.2016.

incident was not connected to the UK as such. Rather, it was a personal connection to the blogger that they felt the need to address in the blog¹¹⁸.

Susi Lau of *Style Bubble* wrote a whole post on personal experience with not wearing what would one call a typical modern Western swimsuit, but rather covering her body on the beach. She cited her reasons to wear a full-body swimsuit, or sometimes even leggings and a long-sleeved top (which you can see in the **Figure 3**) come from her need for personal comfort, sun protection and confidence, although an imprinted notion from her childhood of what a modesty is also plays its role. She adds, her mother also decided to cover herself on the beach after her mastectomy; she became uncomfortable with showing skin. So, it is understandable why the blogger felt the need to give her viewpoint on the French beach incident¹¹⁹.



Figure 3. Susi Lau in swimming leggings and a long-sleeved swimming top. *Style Bubble*.

Lau claims that in reality the woman on the beach in Nice was wearing a simple long-sleeved top and happened to wear a head-scarf, and when forced to remove the piece it turned out she was wearing a spaghetti-strap top underneath. The photo proof of which you can see in the

¹¹⁸ *Style Bubble* 28.08.2016.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Figure 4. In other words, there was absolutely no need to accuse her of wearing a burkini and force her to remove it, and even if she did in fact wear a burkini it is no one's place to tell her she cannot. In addition, the reasoning behind the burkini ban in Lau's words is also very questionable¹²⁰.



Figure 4. French police is forcing a woman to remove her long-sleeved shirt on the Beach in Nice. *The Guardian*.

Firstly, one of the reasons given by French authorities to condone such treatment of women covered in head-to-toe swim wear on the beach is to fight against Middle Eastern male dominance over their women and telling them how to dress. Laurence Rossignol, the government's minister for women's rights, told French daily *Le Parisien*: "The burkini is not some new line of swimwear; it is the beach version of burqa and it has the same logic: hide women's bodies in order to better control them"¹²¹.

Rossignol chose to use feminism and women's rights to wear what they want (among other rights) without men telling them to do so as a defence for the French policemen's actions. Nevertheless, in my opinion it does seem rather anti-feministic to have police-men to

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Reuters in Paris, *The Guardian* 16.08.2016.

surround a woman on the beach and tell her to take her clothes off. In addition, although officially unconfirmed in any news

outlet, the woman on the beach was assumed to be a Muslim (she, however, also confirmed that it was only a scarf she was wearing and not a burqa nor a burkini, and never said anything about being a Muslim¹²²). So, the incident in Nice and the burkini ban itself are not only anti-feministic, but also

racist. It appears as though Islamophobia and anti-feminism are two sides of the same coin¹²³.

Secondly, in Lau's words, just because Western, or in this case French *normal* is to uncover female bodies on the beach, does not mean that it is normal for every woman to do so. Also, it does not suggest that the woman on the beach has necessarily been pressured into covering herself, referring once more to her own and her mother's decisions to cover themselves on the beaches. The blogger continues that there are also other reasons besides religion for women (and men) to not uncover themselves on the beach. It can be the sun protection due to sensitive skin, scars, and just general body confidence, so to justify the burkini ban as a protection of women's rights is downright absurd¹²⁴.

The Brexit referendum and eventual exit of Great Britain from the EU caused even more outrage in

the blogging community. Cara Santana de Silva of *Wish Wish Wish* expressed her fury with the xenophobia that lies in the heart of Brexit. Her husband is an immigrant to the UK, and she says that they would never have met if it was not for the free movement that EU provides for its citizens. Also, she encourages her readers to keep the conversation going around racism and inequality among their friends and blogging community, although at the same time acknowledges that it is rather strange that she posts such an important message alongside dozens of photos of herself in a pretty dress¹²⁵.

¹²² Said-Moorhouse, CNN 25.08.2016.

¹²³ Törnberg et al. 2016, 402.

¹²⁴ Style Bubble 28.08.2016.

¹²⁵ *Wish Wish Wish* 29.06.2016.

One might not understand why fashion bloggers choose to express their political views in their blogs, however it actually makes a lot of sense if we look at it from the same perspective as we did with talking about their private lives. It is a way of helping readers to identify with their favourite fashion blogger. Fashion is a combination of creativity and social condition, technological innovations, and last but not least, current political and economical situations. Furthermore, for fashion to evolve two main rules apply: creative imagination and personal identification with the potential customer¹²⁶. This identification leads to more readers, in the case of fashion blogging, who might share similar opinions, thus for a fashion blogging business to grow.

Instead of talking about Brexit straightforwardly, *Hannah Gale* decided right after the referendum on June 2016 to write a post on her beloved grandparents, immigrants from Poland during WWII. This is a different approach compared to other bloggers to state her political opinion on the matter. Gale wrote about how her grandparents fled Poland after WWII just broke off with no money and only hoping to make it safe to Britain in hope to save their lives and create a better future for themselves¹²⁷.

“And then I think about what would have happened if England had said no, if every European country had said no. If we’d have said no siree, you Polish vermin, you can get out of our country, stop stealing our jobs and our houses and our land. Go back to where you came from.”¹²⁸.

To my mind, it is important to acknowledge the significance of social media, or in this case blogging, when it comes to sharing the news or interpreting those that come from more traditional media outlets; even if the news do not refer to an issue directly. Although, social media shares similar traits of news sharing to traditional media, its goal is to spark a

¹²⁶ Sedeke, Arora 2013, 4.

¹²⁷ Hannah Gale blog 29.06.2016.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

conversation around the topic, and give the voice to everyday people¹²⁹. So, even when the blogger chooses to share their story that is linked to the current political situation instead of talking about the issue directly, unlike the tradition media, it opens a window for debate between them and their followers.

Sandra Hagelstam of *5 Inch and Up* however, did not give her opinion on the Brexit and what it means for immigrants living in the UK, and who have been calling it home for years. On one hand, Hagelstam is a Finnish immigrant based in the UK, so presumably she has an opinion on the matter she might want to share with her readers. On the other, however, her blog *5 Inch and Up* was never about giving opinions other than about shoes, fashion events or traveling. The reason for this might be as simple as just constructing her identity through only clothes and not getting personal. Fashion bloggers create their identity through dressing up just as they do by simply operating their blogs¹³⁰. It is a way of communication with the readers.

On the contrary, Freddie Harrel who is very outspoken about being a daughter of immigrants from Cameroon and what it was like for her to grow up in a predominantly white culture of Paris which we touched upon in the subchapter *Ethnicity*¹³¹, also spoke out about white privilege issue and racism. In the interview for a YouTube channel *Refinery29* Harrel addressed her relationship with her white husband, and how their relationships affect her public persona¹³².

The blogger started with being angry that as soon as people find out her husband is white they automatically claim that all she earned professionally and personally is because of him. However, she does give an insight of how different his upbringing was, compared to Harrel's, and the way it affected their relationship. To begin with, the husband was brought up in a very privileged English household with lots of money, boarding schools, nannies, tutors, fancy

¹²⁹ Törnberg et al. 2016, 403.

¹³⁰ Rocamora 2011, 411.

¹³¹ Freddie Harrel blog 26.03.2016.

¹³² Refinery29 24.10.2018.

holidays. And only now he fully understands how it benefited his life. Secondly, Harrel continues that while building their relationship they had to learn the hard way that some of the people in his life were prejudiced to say the least. Although, the blogger restrains herself from using the word *racist* because it offends people and they will not listen anymore to what she has to tell them about their white privilege. She carries on about how often she has been attacked online and in person due to her being a black woman and having a white husband, and mostly that criticism would come from African people. Those people who were attacking her shamed her for marrying a white man even though she has African ancestry, as if “we’re really working hard on finding our white husbands” (speaking on behalf of black European women)¹³³.

Moreover, Harrel mentions how now that she has a son she noticed that people in his nursery would refer to his childish energy as “problematic” and call him a “beast” whilst the white boy with the same energy would be “opinionated”, “confident” and “knows what he wants”. Whilst having one of the parents “on the top of the food chain” as Harrel referred to her husband, the baby’s father had to learn fast about his own white privilege and what it is like to raise a biracial boy¹³⁴.

However, as far as I am concerned, *Wish Wish Wish*, *Hannah Gale*, *Style Bubble* and *Freddie Harrel* are the only four fashion bloggers out of the ones I was researching who make any type of political statements. *That Pommie Girl*, for instance makes no statements on any matter I am covering in this thesis. Her blog consists strictly photos of herself in outfits where she also names the brands she is wearing in the photo. It also seems that the posts have been deleted since I last read her blog back in

2017. Now it contains only twenty-one entries that also do not contain dates, so it is impossible to say when the last time she updated the blog or how old is the first post on the main page. The blog has been running since 2015 as it says in the description¹³⁵, and the only

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Refinery29 24.10.2018.

¹³⁵ That Pommie Girl 2019.

post I found that holds any sort of (political) message is of the blogger in a T-shirt that says *Girls Supporting Girls*, the photo of which is a **Figure 5**.

I assume it refers to one of latest feminist messages *Girl Power* promoting female empowerment and inspiring young women to believe in themselves, and thrive to be the best version of themselves while lifting up other women¹³⁶. I must admit, however, that due to the lack of the data on the fashion blog *That Pommie Girl* I have no evidence to support my assumption.



Figure 5. *That Pommie Girl* in the T-shirt with a feminist message supporting Girl Power (allegedly). *That Pommie Girl* blog.

Ella Catliff of *La Petite Anglaise* and *India Rose* are also rather short-worded on anything that isn't a fashion event or a collaboration with a fashion brand. Their posts are rare and often strictly business related.

¹³⁶ HuffPost 01.10.2017.

Hannahlouise blogger Hannah Farrington has been one of the blogs I found hard to find much information on any of the subjects we are discussing in this thesis. The fashion blog contains mostly of fashion-related posts which is natural, but also some other posts that brought very little information to this research. However, I did manage to find a little glimpse into blogger's personal thoughts on some political matters, such as racism and cultural appropriation¹³⁷.

Farrington wrote an essay on her blog with the help of her friends Suki and Shope on why it is absolutely unacceptable to use the cultures, in this case, clothes pieces at music festivals. The three women are urging fashion bloggers and influencers to at least be more critical of their fashion choices and what they are promoting because of the cultural appropriation even if not intentional. She pointed out though that as a white girl she feels it is not suitable for her to talk much about cultural appropriation, thus her Pakistani friend Suki and a black one Shope are weighing on their opinions on South Asian and black culture's cultural appropriations, respectively¹³⁸.

Suki started off with asking how come people outside the Indian subcontinent think it is ok wearing bindi (a coloured dot in the centre of a forehead) as a simple fashion statement because it is *cool*. She says that she is convinced that especially the girls at the festivals have no clue about its meaning and therefore do not respect its origin, and the message it delivers. It is disrespectful towards the people who do not have the same privilege. Suki argues that when told by people they would not mind if an Asian adopted something from their culture but this isn't a *cultural exchange*, and that's the point. For cultural exchange to happen, she claims, one has to understand and respect¹³⁹.

Suki carries on describing her childhood in the British school wearing traditional Asian clothing and feeling different, so when she sees girls wearing bindi and not realising all the

¹³⁷ hannahlouise 01.08.2015

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

oppression that comes with being Asian it makes her angry. It means that what is acceptable to one social group is not acceptable to the other and Asian people do not receive the same level of praise for wearing bindi as white people do. It seems that these people adapt Asian culture without accepting Asians¹⁴⁰.

The next part of the essay wrote Shope on “fashion’s appropriation of black culture”. She goes as far as calling cultural appropriation a *racism*. Shope claims that even wearing a *black* hairstyle such as corn-rows is racist, however people get overly defensive when being called racist instead of trying to understand the implication behind the message¹⁴¹.

The message is that white people choose to dive into the black culture which the black people have no choice to live out of. And this concerns greater issues black people have to live in like police brutality, problematic stereotypes and institutionalised racism. Racism as told by Shope comes in different shapes and forms, and fashion bloggers alongside fashion influencers should be more sensitive to the next headband they want to use to the music festival if it even remotely resembles Native American accessory. Although, the contributor adds that she does not believe cultural appropriation will be *cured* in the nearest future as it is just like racism almost engraved into people’s lives and their cannot always see what is racist and what is not¹⁴².

It is hard for me to explain why Hannah Farrington chooses to stay rather non-verbal on most topics that do not concern fashion, she chose to contribute to the issue of cultural appropriation. I can only assume that this is the vision she has for her blogging career: to be strictly about fashion.

3.2. CONSUMERISM: CLOTHES AND THE MARKET

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Blogging is a networking structure. It is a community where through comment sections, social media that is linked to it, subscriptions, and by simple entries (posts) bloggers communicate with each other¹⁴³ and their readers.

Fashion blogging is a new way for consumers and retailers to communicate season to season, too. While researching blogs it became obvious that regardless of the content creation style, and how each blogger presents herself to the public one thing remains true to all of them: clothes. They wear different styles of clothes, they post pictures of their almost daily outfits, they talk about those outfits, and of course reference them. This is probably the most crucial part of fashion blogging — to reference the brands of clothing the blogger is wearing in the picture. After all, these women are *fashion* bloggers. The reference usually includes a) a fashion company certain piece of clothing belongs to, and b) a link (also known as an affiliate link) to the web store, or the name of a physical store that piece was bought in¹⁴⁴. Sometimes, even the price is mentioned, but that depends on blogger's preferences¹⁴⁵.

The referencing, therefore, gives readers an opportunity to buy that dress or that hat, or that purse they liked on the blogger which in addition works in favour of both — the fashion company and the blogger. Hannah Gale actually wrote an entry *Making Money From Blogging* on her blog about how bloggers make money where it was stated that there are three ways to do so:

1. Sponsored posts;
2. Affiliated links
3. On-site advertising¹⁴⁶.

So, to begin with, as Gale explained in her post a lot of times bloggers will collaborate with a fashion brand to promote the latter one's clothes or accessories in return of financial gain and

¹⁴³ Chau, Xu 2012, 1191.

¹⁴⁴ Camille Over the Rainbow 16.06.2016.

¹⁴⁵ 5 Inch and Up 19.04.2017.

¹⁴⁶ Hannah Gale blog 16.07.2016.

free samples. This type of money-making is called *sponsored posts*. The sponsored posts are valid not only for blogs but also social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter¹⁴⁷.

A fashion company contacts a blogger and offers her to promote their products. The blogger then has to send them a *rate card* which is a PDF document with a summary of fees for various social media platforms the blogger can promote the product on¹⁴⁸. Afterwards, the company and the blogger decide on the content production, as in will the blogger have complete autonomy on how to promote the product, or will the company give an outline to how they want their product to be advertised. After the fee and the content production negotiations, the contract is signed between the company and the blogger. Sometimes, bloggers choose their agents to negotiate all the sponsored campaigns because they either don't like to talk about money, or they feel they don't know how much money to ask, or they simply don't have time to manage all their emails. In addition, regardless of the social media platform the sponsored product will be advertised on, the blogger must announce that the advertisement is sponsored. It is after this that the blogger invoices the company and is being paid within thirty days of the campaign going live¹⁴⁹.

Another way for a blogger to make money is through affiliated links which I mentioned in the beginning of this subchapter. This is probably the most common way of making money since the blogger does not have to be well known or have a big following so that companies themselves offer them deals. So, even those who just started in the blogging business can use these links to support themselves financially. Simply put, an affiliate link is every entry (post) on any social media platform including the blog itself. If a reader clicks on it, the blogger will have thirty days for that reader to buy either some specific item that the link is connected to, or anything from the webpage the link refers to. When someone buys something through the link approximately 7% of the purchase goes to the blogger. However, if the same person bought something from the webpage the link refers to but through the link of some other

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 14.07.2016.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 16.07.2016.

blogger's post those money will go to that other blogger. It is because affiliated links are connected specifically to each blogger in order for them to actually make a financial profit out of advertisement and promotion. The downfall for this type of money-making though, is that it might take three months for some person to buy an item through the link¹⁵⁰.

According to Gale, the last but not least way to make money for bloggers, is an on-site advertisement which is everything from pop-up adverts to big window size banners that are featured on blogs for a various amount of time. However, as Gale pointed out these became less popular since she started her blog in 2014 because nowadays both bloggers and the advertising companies prefer more natural looking adverts. Although it is still a needed and popular way to earn some extra cash¹⁵¹.

Blogs obviously influence the purchases. Also, the most evident customers of fashion companies that are influenced by blogs are under 35 years old¹⁵². However, it is not just the readers we are talking about here, but the bloggers themselves. In order to keep the content of a fashion blog flowing and for the outfits in the photos not to be repetitive bloggers spend much time and money on purchasing new purses, dresses, shoes, hats and other clothing, themselves. Bloggers like *Hannah Gale*¹⁵³, Carrie Santana de Silva (*Wish Wish Wish*)¹⁵⁴, Hannah Farrington (*hannahlouisef*)¹⁵⁵ even do seasonal or monthly shopping hauls to update their outfits, and consequently the content considering they write entries about the hauls; but also, very possibly — to create more affiliated links, and therefore earn money. When it comes to fashion brands and creating possible new collaborations with a blogger, these shopping tendencies of bloggers are maybe even a bigger priority than the click on an affiliated link. That is because the review from a blogger of a new item can either start a trend

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Navarro et al. 2016, 88.

¹⁵³ Hannah Gale blog 13.02.2017.

¹⁵⁴ Wish Wish Wish 15.08.2017.

¹⁵⁵ hannahlouisef 06.12.2016.

or sink the product, even if not intentionally¹⁵⁶.

On the other hand, bloggers such as Camille Charrière (*Camille Over the Rainbow*), Sandra Hagelstam (*5 Inch and Up*), Ella Catliff (*La Petite Anglaise*) and Susi Lau (*Style Bubble*) don't do *hauls*. I assume that is due to their bigger commercial success. Unlike the other bloggers I mentioned earlier, based on the content of their blogs and social media these women lead more luxurious lifestyles, wear mostly (if not only) designer fashion brands and collaborate with those. In addition, they are frequent visitors to Fashion Weeks, and feature in the popular fashion magazines¹⁵⁷ such as ELLE, Marie Claire and Vogue. Therefore, it appears they are being paid much more than other bloggers I researched for this thesis.

It is unclear why some bloggers do shopping hauls, constantly promoting much more affordable clothes and seem to be much more relatable to the wider audience of women, yet do not have the same commercial success as their colleagues with considerably more expensive taste. Nevertheless, regardless of the commercial success of either type of a blogger both groups contribute to the consumers' behaviour immensely¹⁵⁸.

For example, fashion market is incredibly competitive and online medium has as big of a part in its development as never before. Today it is popular to be able to buy anything from around the world by just clicking a button on the screen¹⁵⁹. In fact, sometimes it is the only way to purchase a piece one wants, especially if it has to be done from another part of the world.

Fashion bloggers gave a new meaning to shopping and influencing people on what to buy. These women collaborate with brands and designers, are faces of the fashion campaigns and constantly, directly or indirectly, tell their readers what is *in* right now. Thanks to their connection to regular people on a personal level it is quite clear why fashion bloggers became

¹⁵⁶ Navarro et al. 2016, 88.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 90.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 97-98.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 90.

so important for the online fashion market¹⁶⁰.

However, it is also important to note why fashion blogging is becoming more influential in the fashion industry than most other types of advertisement¹⁶¹. Not only because people can personally relate to the blogger, and therefore trust their judgement¹⁶², but also because of the way they advertise the product.

It is the non-aggressive, non-biased way of telling the potential customer why the product works. It is the *blog politics* of advertisement that makes it so much more costumer-friendly. Bloggers give their honest opinions on the merchandise, and since they are their own brand with personal style their impact is undeniable¹⁶³.

Nevertheless, it is still debatable how honest bloggers are in their advertisements. Just like with the advertising that comes directly from a fashion brand, there is no way to know if one can fully trust blogger's claims. Unfortunately, I could not find more information on this matter because, I assume, the issue has not been researched yet. Although, based purely on my study of fashion blogs presented in this thesis I can say that unless the blogger herself chooses to be transparent about the brand she promotes (sponsored one), then one can never be fully sure about her words¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Fernandez et al. 2015, 4.

¹⁶³ Navarro et al. 2016, 90.

¹⁶⁴ Freddie Harrel blog 27.09.2016.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, I would like to start with answering questions I have set in the beginning of this research. Firstly, *how bloggers choose to create their identity through the medium of fashion blog?*

Based on my research, the creation of identity as such is a rather subconscious act. Fashion bloggers choose different approaches to running their blog. Essentially, we can divide running a blog into two directions. One way of running a blog is to share lots of aspects of personal life as an addition to the fashion segments. That way, a blogger will be able to share thoughts and tips on everything from struggles with body image and health, to sharing latest purchases, to announcing life's thresholds such as marriage and pregnancy.

This type of fashion bloggers create their fashionable persona by building strong network of followers who with time will feel as they know the blogger personally. Bloggers find it their duty to share their thoughts and opinions with the audience, and therefore convince, for the lack of a better word, the readers that they are just like them. They all share similar problems, have similar views and even looks. More so, clothes these bloggers wear and advertise are much more budget friendly, and usually come from high-street fashion. So, in this sense more people can relate to them and read their blogs to find affordable inspiration whilst shopping.

Among the blogs I have been researching, this type of hands-on blog running can be referred to Hannah Gale (*Hannah Gale*), Carrie Santana de Silva (*Wish Wish Wish*), Freddie Harrel (*Freddie Harrel*), and sometimes even Susie Lau (*Style Bubble*).

On the other hand, we have bloggers who choose to create their online persona by remaining faithful to the main theme of their blog — fashion. These bloggers would be Sandra Hagelstam (*5 Inch and Up*), Camille Charrière (*Camille Over the Rainbow*), Ella Catliff (*La Petite Anglaise*), and most often Susie Lau (*Style Bubble*).

Even though, these bloggers are rather reserved in their blogging when it comes to sharing personal details, they are much more commercially successful. Unlike bloggers who build

their blogging brand on forming more personal relationships with readers, this second type of bloggers is being acknowledged internationally by fashion industry. They also promote more luxurious lifestyles that in return gain them a different type of followers and attention.

There is also a third type of bloggers. Those would be Hannah Farrington (*hannahlouise*) and Sarah Ashcroft (*That Pommie Girl*). These fashion bloggers do not seem to have any particular strategy on what type of following they would like to gain and what direction they want to take their blogs in the future. They are not particularly outspoken on any topic besides clothes, but even so they are yet to find their niche in fashion blogging in order for it to stand out among other blogs.

There is no wrong or right way of blogging on the topic of fashion, though. It is about what type of persona, and as a result, a brand, one wants to create. This conclusively leads us to the second question: *Is there a formula to becoming a successful fashion blogger?*

Even with the results of my research I am still struggling to answer this question. We have discussed how bloggers view body image, how much they are willing to share with their followers, and how much their background influences the development of their style and brand. Moreover, we discovered that there are two types of successful bloggers, the difference is in the type of lifestyle they are interested in. As a result, that one they tend to promote and consider 'successful'.

As for the financial part, bloggers make money the same way through sponsorships and affiliated links. So, the difference in the amount of financial rewards they receive depends purely on how costly the products advertised are. The more expensive the piece the more payment the blogger will receive through affiliate link.

Sponsorship is different because the prestige and reputation of the brand that might offer a paid sponsorship depends on commercial success of the blogger. As a result, if the blogger appears in a campaign for a successful fashion brand the more followers she will probably get, and very possible even more recognition in the high fashion industry.

Last but not least, *how does the content of fashion blogs impact its followers?* In this research of mine we have explored how fashion bloggers react to significant issues in the world of politics and body image among women. Especially these topics are important because they lead to the same major subject of *acceptance*.

Whether we as women struggle with our bodies, looks, race or any type of discrimination in our daily lives, online media accelerates these issues to another level. Bloggers in my thesis have been very open about their struggles of not being accepted by people, even in their own (online) communities. They, nevertheless, also stood up for those who were being discriminated (the burkini incident in France). However, regardless of the reasons they decided to share such personal struggles with the online community it had an affect of connecting them to their followers. In fact, as Rocamora claimed the narration of stories whatever they are does not steal attention from the fashion, but rather enhances it.

We also explored the affect world politics have on the online fashion community. Despite being a medium for fashion review, when major discrimination happens in Europe blogs are turning into a platform to express the displeasure over subjects such as xenophobia and nationalism. At least the particular blogs that I have been studying for this thesis it is clear why these women feel the need to speak their mind. Most of them are immigrants, or have someone close to them as an immigrant.

Followers, on the other hand respond to such personal messages from bloggers whether in the comment sections, or in the personal message via other types of social media. And even, if we as researchers cannot see the affect blogger has on her followers, we still discovered that blogging is beneficial for self-esteem for both parties.

To sum up, what creates an identity of fashion bloggers is a combination of characteristics that are outside her control, such as looks and personal background, but also the way she chooses to present herself in the online world. It is everything, from opinions on the personal matters that lots of her readers can relate to as women, to opinions on global issues that give the blogger voice and personality outside means of fashion and style.

In addition, fashionable persona of the blogger is build through the network of her online community. She produces content that will attract new followers and also keep entertained the current ones. Thus, her desire to appeal to different types of people and shape their opinions on style also makes her adapt to the current flow of things in order to stay relevant.

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